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SUBJECT: FIRST MEETING OF THE CIVIC AND VOTER EDUCATION GROUP

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Election Donor Group (EDG) held the first meeting of its sub-group for civic and voter education on November 18, at the European Commission headquarters in Khartoum. The meeting was a brainstorming session to discuss the objectives and terms of reference (TOR) for the group, exchange information on current donor support, and suggest ideas on potential areas of intervention. Those present, including DFID, CIDA, the US, the UN and Norway, agreed on the importance of coordinating donor support in the period leading up to the elections. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Donor development partners, led by the European Commission, the Dutch and the Canadians, established the Electoral Donor Group (EDG) to facilitate dialogue, share information and improve international coordination with the electoral process in Sudan, with a view of developing a common approach to electoral assistance. (Note: The EDG is not a CPA-mandated institution. End note.) According to the proposed TOR for the civic and voter education sub-group, it would help contribute to a "harmonised and coordinated response of the donor and international community in support of the elections; a meaningful and productive dialogue and support mechanism between the government and the international community; and an election law that is according to international standards." The TOR also proposes a joint "basket fund" to which donors would contribute; poloff indicated that USG efforts would be independent of this fund.

¶3. (SBU) DFID is currently preparing to move forward on an 11 million-pound project targeting civil society and media prior to the elections, with an emphasis on reaching non-urban areas. The UNMIS elections groups will begin sending voter volunteers to the field in January for a ground assessment before undertaking voter education projects. For its part, CIDA put forward a proposal through which it would conduct a baseline study on civic and voter education projects throughout Sudan, envisioning it initially as a resource for the donor community. All present agreed on the necessity of coordinating activities with the government of Sudan.

ELECTIONS BACKGROUND

¶4. (SBU) Scheduled to take place in 2009, general elections are a major milestone of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). They are scheduled to take place on six levels: for the presidencies of the Government of National Unity (GNU) and the Government of Southern Sudan (GOSS); for the National Assembly and the South Sudan Legislative Assembly; and for the governorships and state legislatures in all 25 states. Domestic and international institutions are already planning for the elections, although many legal and logistic issues must be resolved before they take place. Sudan must conduct a census; clarify or pass laws regarding political parties and the conduct of election; embark upon voter

registration, civic education, and training of election monitors and polling agents; and confirm the election date.

¶5. (SBU) The management and operational framework of the EDG asks the Chair person to call and host a monthly meeting of the EDG, and establish subgroups to discuss, share information and provide advice to the EDG on specific election related areas. The civic and voter education group is one of the subgroups included in the current six subgroups of the EDG.

¶6. (SBU) The CPA states that the elections must be held by July 2009, but the date has not yet been set. Some donors are concerned that holding the elections in July, which falls in the middle of the rainy season, would disenfranchise southern voters. Moreover, since the constitutions of both the north and the south call for a runoff if a presidential candidate does not obtain more than 50 percent of the vote in the election, planning for this eventuality must take place as well. Currently, donors are discussing the possibility of holding elections in February, which would allow a potential runoff election before the beginning of the rainy season in April.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: Despite the current NCP-SPLM political impasse, donors are moving forward with planning for the census (septel) and elections. Donors were enthusiastic about the CIDA proposal, as there is no baseline study currently in the works. Though still in the early stages, the civic and voter EDG subgroup seems to be moving in the right direction. The next meeting will take place in early December. End comment.

FERNANDEZ